

the primary wing-coverts, but sometimes extending onto the primaries. A comparison of Plate 1 with the illustrations given in the papers just mentioned reveals a certain measure of similarity. Whether or not any significance can be attached to this is problematical, but the basic resemblance of the markings and the similar *locus* are worth noting.

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House Crow's nest in a house

by K. Z. HUSAIN

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The Indian House Crow (*Corvus s. splendens*) is one of the commonest birds of East Pakistan and one whose close association with man is well known. Although it spends practically the whole of the day, as well as of the year, near and around houses, it is known to nest only in trees. I recently saw a pair of these House Crows building inside a house, which, as far as I can see (Baker, 1922; Fletcher & Inglis, 1936; Whistler, 1949; Ali, 1955; and others) has not yet been recorded in literature.

The nest was in fact built in my house which occupies the first floor of the two-storied southern (front) block of a quadrangular residential Hall of the University of Dacca. There is a fairly big lawn in front with only two Bottle-palm (Royal-palm) trees close to the gate and two buildings at a distance. There are several big trees about 100 yards away and many House Crows nest in them. The pair in question built their nest in the verandah of my house. The verandah is about 45 feet long, 8 feet wide and 13 feet high. The roof is supported in the front by seven 2-feet wide pillars at a distance of five feet from one another; the verandah has a 3 feet high wall rising from the floor, and also a 3 feet wide wall descending from the roof. An unused 3 feet long metal bracket, which once conducted electric wires, projects from the wall of the house and into the verandah. The bracket is located at 13 feet above the floor, and there are some broken wires connected to it. The House Crows brought in some sticks and built their nest; thus, it can be said that the nest was built well within the house.

The nest must have been built between the 23rd and 29th April, 1963, when I and my family were away. An egg was laid on the 30th April or 1st May. The egg hatched on the 21st May, but unfortunately the nestling died on the 14th June.

This unsuccessful attempt by the House Crows at nesting in a house, the circumstances which presumably led to the nestling's death, and a few other activities of these crows during the period under review seem to me to be of significance, and are therefore briefly reported below.

(1) The House Crows in question laid only one egg. This seems to be significant, because, according to existing literature, they lay at least four,

the maximum number being as many as seven. Fletcher & Inglis (*op. cit.*) mention that very rarely they may lay two eggs.

(2) Only the female seemed to incubate the egg, though Ali (*op. cit.*) says that both sexes share incubation. (Incidentally, the male of this pair was recognisable by two broken tail-feathers, as well as by activities to be mentioned below.) During incubation, the male remained relatively silent; hardly came to the nest, but often came and sat on the palm tree in front of the house.

(3) The female appeared to be very afraid of human presence, and would not go to the nest as long as anybody was in the verandah. Once in



the nest, she would not feel disturbed, but would immediately fly away if anybody looked directly at it.

(4) As soon as the egg hatched, the male suddenly became very alert, aggressive and noisy. He would raise quite a hue and cry at anybody passing through the verandah. If threatened, he would fly away most reluctantly and sit on the tree. There, he would raise his bill as high as he could and then strike the leaves with great force, repeating this several times and tearing the leaves into pieces. The female would also perform this but less aggressively.

(5) Both the parents participated in feeding the nestling, but the male appeared to do so only occasionally. His main duty was to sit on the tree and guard the nest almost constantly. It never happened that anyone passed through the verandah without being 'charged' by him, but the slightest movement of hands would drive him far away. Neither of the parents would go to the nest to feed the nestling as long as anybody was in the verandah.

(6) For the first week or so, the female sat over the nestling for the whole night and quite often during the day, just as she sat over the egg during incubation, but from the second week she did not do so, and both the parents passed the nights sitting on the roof of the building in front of my house.

(7) On the 14th morning, while loitering in the verandah, I was surprised at not being 'attacked' by the parents, who were sitting silently on the tree. I naturally suspected something unusual and, on checking the nest, found the nestling dead. As I tried to bring it down, the parents rushed to the verandah, protested for a while, and then became silent. A little later, they came to the nest, looked around silently, and then went away never to return, although they are still living around my house.

In conclusion, I cannot claim that I know the exact reasons for the nestling's death, but there is no doubt that there had been a lot of interference and the parents could not properly feed and look after it, which may well have caused its death. I have a feeling that the nesting would have been a success but for our presence in the house. On this assumption, I suggest that, although the House Crows are closely associated with human dwellings, they do not build in houses because they have not overcome the fear or shyness of actual human presence close to their nests or nesting site. This may well be a reason why they build high up in trees far beyond human interference. Other birds of similar habit, the House Sparrows for example, do not have such fear and can successfully complete their nesting in human dwellings. The failure on the part of the House Crows under discussion is, therefore, due to natural selection which does not seem to favour such sporadic and out of the way venture by them.

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A peculiar mutant sunbird

by MELVIN A. TRAYLOR

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During October and November 1961 I had the opportunity of collecting in the Kalabo District of Barotseland, Northern Rhodesia. Here one of the most common sunbirds was the Marico Sunbird, *Nectarinia mariquensis* (Smith) and we succeeded in obtaining a series of 12 adult males. Among these was one from Sikongo that at first glance appeared to be completely melanistic. However, it is actually normal in pigment, but has the structural part of the feather so changed that there is no iridescent colour.

Normal *mariquensis* is iridescent green on the back, lesser and median coverts, head, and upper breast, with upper tail-coverts and a thin band on the breast shading to bluish-violet. Below the iridescent violet on the breast is a red breast band. Each feather of this band has a broad red tip with a narrow violet iridescent band below it. Belly, wings and tail are black.

The mutant male is wholly black with the exception of the red breast band which is normal in colour (see fig.). The areas, which in normally coloured birds are green, are glossy black, and the only sign of colour is on the upper tail-coverts and breast where there is a faint wash of purple. These are the areas that are iridescent bluish-violet normally. Since the